GUIDE TO THE NV9 TZELTAL FILE

[The Tzeltal are an American Indian ethnic group concentrated in the central highlands of the State of Chiapas, Mexico. Contiguous Indian groups are the Tzotzil to the west, the Chol to the north and northeast, and the Tojolabal to the southeast. However, the basic population cleavage in the Chiapas highlands is between the Ladinos (Spanish-speaking, usually racially mixed people) who occupy primarily the major towns, and the Indians who live primarily in outlying municipios (cf. Evon Z. Vogt, "Chiapas Highlands," in Robert Wauchope, ed., Handbook of Middle American Indians, Vol. 7, 1969, pp. 133-34, map on p. 136, p. 137).

The Tzeltal and Tzotzil languages form the Tzeltalan subdivision of the Mayan language family. Lexicostatistic studies indicate that these two languages probably became differentiated around 1200 A.D. (cf. Vogt, 1969, p. 140).

The Tzeltal-speaking population numbered approximately 50,000 in ca. 1950. This population is distributed through twelve municipios with thirteen main communities. Of the latter, nine are almost entirely Indian (i.e. reported to be over 85 per cent Tzeltal-speaking): Aguacatenango, Amatenango, Cancuc, Chanal, Chilon, Oxchuc, Tenejapa, Petalcingo, and Sitala. The other four communities are about 65 to 80 per cent Tzeltal-speaking: Altamirano, Ocosingo, Villa de las Rosas, and Yajalan (cf. 4: Villa Rojas, pp. 195-96; Vogt, 1969, p. 139).

Ecologically, the Tzeltal region divides into three zones: north, central, and south. Some demographic and cultural variations coordinate with these zones. More fundamentally, however, each Tzeltal community constitutes a distinct social and cultural unit. "Each community has its well-defined lands, its own dialect forms, wearing apparel, kinship system, politico-religious organization, economic resources, crafts, and other cultural features" (4: Villa Rojas, p. 197). Strong intra-community solidarity contrasts with the lack of any social or political solidarity at the ethnic group level.

Basic food sources consist of maize, beans, chile, and squash, supplemented by manioc, sweetpotato, potato, chayote, chickens, and pigs (4: Villa Rojas, pp. 202-203).

All of the Tzeltal communities follow an essentially similar structural pattern, with a town center which may be heavily or thinly populated, and a number of communities, called parajes, which are scattered over the municipio. The town is the political, religious, and commercial center of the entire community. The town centers are divided into two sections, called barrios or calpules, each with its own local authorities and sometimes its own patron saint. In addition to political and religious functions, each barrio traditionally was endogamous (4: Villa Rojas, pp. 203, 205).

Other major aspects of traditional Tzeltal social organization which persist today in the more conservative communities include exogamous patrilineal sibs, patrilineal lineages within which land is inherited, and an Omaha

type kinship terminology. In the more acculturated communities the sib-lineage system tends to disappear and to be replaced by a bilateral system similar to that characterizing Ladino society. Although there are some extended families, the nuclear family is the basic pattern (4: Villa Rojas, pp. 213-16).

Nine sources, all by ethnologists, have been processed for this file. Except for one translation from Spanish (1: Guiteras Holmes), all of the sources are in English. The basic sources are 7: Nash and 8: Hunt, but 4: Villa Rojas contains an excellent general summary of Tzeltal ethnography and culture history, which provides a very useful starting point for the study of Tzeltal culture.

Nash's field work covered a period of 18 months during five field trips in the years 1957-58, 1964-67, and was concentrated in the municipio of Amatenango del Valle. 7: Nash is a study of socio-cultural change in Amatenango, focusing on the economy, political leadership, religion, and relationships with the Ladino population and the Mexican government. 3: Nash provides a very interesting analysis of 37 homicide cases which occurred between 1938 and 1965 in the fictitiously named town of "Teklum." 9: Nash is a structural-functional study of the change of officials in the community of Tzo?ontahal.

8: Hunt is a Ph. D. dissertation based on field work in 1958. Hunt focuses on an analysis and comparison of domestic group organization and process in the communities of Amatenango and Aguacatenango. 6:

Metzger is also a dissertation based on field work in Aguacatenango, but concentrates on a narrower study of ceremonial drinking patterns.

The earliest source is 5: Blom and LaFarge, which presents detailed descriptions of aspects of material culture obtained during an expedition through the Chiapas highlands in 1925. 2: Redfield and Villa Rojas is a generalized account of community organization and cultural patterns derived both from the literature and a short period of field work (ca. 1 month) by Villa Rojas in 1938.

Finally, 1: Guiteras Holmes is a short article analyzing the unilineal kin groups and kinship terminology in the town of Cancuc. Data were gathered during two short field trips totaling about three months in 1945 and 1946.

Generally, this is a good file as it now stands, but a number of major sources which have yet to be included should also be consulted by the researcher.]

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